

THE BLUEGRASS BUGLE



Participants of the second annual festival of traditional American bluegrass music in Vologda



The festival audience listens to the music of bluegrass

THE U.S.-RUSSIA BILATERAL
PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION
BRINGS BLUEGRASS
BACK TO RUSSIA

A BLEND OF BLUEGRASS, FURTHER BLENDED

Russians often think of jazz or rock n' roll as the identifiable genre of American music. Bluegrass, on the other hand, is less familiar. It has a hazier definition and stems from a mix of multiple genres. It's hard to place a finger on what bluegrass actually is. One of the originators of bluegrass, mandolinist Bill Monroe, defined the genre as: "Scottish bagpipes and ole-time fiddlin'. It's Methodist and Holiness and Baptist.

It's blues and jazz, and it has a high lonesome sound". Traditional bluegrass tunes are often narratives about the everyday lives of the people who created the music. Typically, these songs focus on themes of lost love, lonesome woes, the railroad industry, and the trials of existence in the rural South. As compared to jazz, which flourished in the urban areas of the United States, bluegrass is a by-product of

the Southern, rural American lifestyle. Although borrowing from a variety of musical styles and influences, bluegrass, once adapted into its rural, Southern context, was considered more of a folk genre than jazz. One of the reasons for this is the tradition of passing bluegrass songs along orally, rather than through written charts or scores. (Continued on the next page.)



Bluegrass Plants Its Seed
in Vologda



To the Urals: The Non-Native
Bluegrass Has Spread



Guitar, Banjo, &...Balalayka!

A Blend of Bluegrass, cont'd.

More often than not, tunes survived because they were passed down through families or were recorded on records. The music of bluegrass is also more of the common man's music. In the areas of its origin, it is not rare to find a man sitting on his front porch with a banjo, picking a bluegrass tune. As opposed to country music, which thrived on commercial success, bluegrass was more a result of the layman's storytelling, and only enjoyed commercial success later on, when its best musicians fell into national interest.

Bluegrass is constantly under the influence of evolution and change. Hard-line traditionalists attempt to bring the genre back to its original roots, whereas fresh enthusiasts pursue a path towards new acoustic bluegrass, merging traditional influence with modern enhancements. To add to the mix, organizers of the first-ever Russian Bluegrass Festival in Vologda, Russia, have continued the legacy of bluegrass oral dissemination. This time, however, the dissemination is to a mostly Russian audience. Located directly in-between the major cities of St. Petersburg and Moscow, Vologda is a prime location for cultural outreach. The city even has older ties to the United States than either of the two main Russian metropolises; merchants from the Vologda region played a key part in developing both Russian Alaska and Russian California. Today, Vologda lays claim to the title of "Cultural Capital of Northern Russia". For the second year in a row, Vologda hosted a Russian Bluegrass Festival, featuring acclaimed American bluegrass bands as well as their own local Russian folk bands. Although the typical bluegrass instrumentation consists of a fiddle, banjo, acoustic guitar, mandolin, dobro, and upright bass, the organizers of the Russian Bluegrass Festival chose to also incorporate Russian folk instruments into their festival of "narodnaya muzyka", adding to the fusion of the already amalgamated American genre.

Bluegrass Plants Its Seed in Vologda

Thanks to the support of the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission and the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State's Performing Arts Initiative together with a little "Foggy Mountain Breakdown," the American Seasons in Russia continued to break down barriers between Russians and Americans in Vologda, one of the four historical homes of the U.S. Mission to Russia. On July 12-13, *Donna Ulisse & the Poor Mountain Boys* from Nashville, Tennessee headlined the Second Russian Bluegrass Festival backed by *Finestreet* (St. Petersburg) and the *Red Brick Boys* (Moscow) with twin concerts in Northern Russia's Cultural Capital (Vologda) and at the nearby outdoor museum at Semyonkovo. Robert Palomo, an American musician who has lived in St. Petersburg for about 15 years, and the folk band *Semyonkovo*, also performed at the event. Both Eric Johnson, the Consul for Press and Culture of the U.S. Consulate General in St. Petersburg, and Aleksandr Suvorov, the Director of the Vologda State Historical and Architectural Museum, greeted the audiences and welcomed them to the festival. Every major regional TV and radio station – along with most local press – were on hand to cover this U.S.-Russian musical event which culminated in all three bands up on stage mashing to Earl Scruggs' legendary bluegrass hit "Foggy Mountain Breakdown." As the leader of the local Semyonkovo folk ensemble pointed out to the large number of kids from nearby summer camps who had gathered at the bluegrass concert: "Folk music shows us just how much we have in common."



DONNA ULISSE & THE POOR MOUNTAIN BOYS

To the Urals: The Non-Native Bluegrass Has Spread

On July 15-16, Yekaterinburg was graced with a bluegrass jamboree. The first international festival, "Bluegrass in the Ural Mountains", organized by the Consulate General of the United States, Izumrud, and the Ural concert agency with support from the City Administration of Yekaterinburg, attracted an impressively large audience. The success of the festival was largely due to the presence of the headlining band- Donna Ulisse and the Poor Mountain Boys. Hailing all the way from Nashville, Tennessee, the musicians were the first American bluegrass musicians to ever perform in the Ural mountain region.

Donna, the lead singer of the band, is an acclaimed American folk singer. During her performance, she told the story behind each song, revealing the universal human values embedded within her compositions. Her powerful voice and heartfelt songs exposed the soul of ordinary Americans to the Russian public gathered at the festival. Trying to say the phrase, "I love you" in Russian to the audience, Donna pronounced something more like, "Yellow Blue Bas". Although her pronunciation was not perfect, the audience understood what she was trying to

say, and was warmed by her kind intent.

The flow of affection between audience and performers increased when the jewel of Yekaterinburg, Izumrud (the Emerald), came out on stage. As they performed their consummate music, clouds that had been gathering in the sky slowly dispersed. The next band, Cheerful Diligence from Obninsk, drew forth loud applause. The musicians of the group are boys and girls of 11-16 years old, but they are already experienced guest performers and winners of international competitions. Founded by their music teacher, Mr. Alexey Gvozdev, Cheerful Diligence is the only children's group in Russia which performs music of this style. Ksenia Fedorova, the banjo player in the group, is a talent unmatched in Russia for her age group. In addition to the bluegrass bands, some of the best local folk-rock bands took part in the festival, including the Stambulchik Brothers, Raydo, Boris Plotnikov, Liza & the Machine, Glad to be Vlad, and others. Upon returning to Nashville, Donna Ulisse wrote a song entitled, "Mother Russia and Me". She and her band plan to record the song in the near future.

Comments from Donna Ulisse and the Poor Mountain Boys

Donna Ulisse (songwriter, vocals, guitar): I am so proud to have shared my music with such a delightful and curious crowd. This was the first time that most of the folks had ever heard bluegrass music and I felt like there was a real connection.

Greg Davis (banjo): The cultural exchange for me was priceless. To get to talk to and share music with the Russian musicians was great and to hear the Russian folk music was an experience and something I will try to incorporate into my own playing. I loved it all!

Rick Stanley (acoustic guitar): Coming to Russia, thanks to the US Consulate, was the experience of a lifetime, something I never dreamed I would get to accomplish. Being able to bring bluegrass music to the Russian people and seeing the response was overwhelming.

Bobby King (upright bass): We were able to have an instant rapport with all of the Russian musicians that we met. It was a testament to the universal language of music. For being halfway around the globe, I felt remarkably at home, although I'll admit that the Cyrillic alphabet had me pretty confused!

Jon Martin (mandolin): I enjoyed the 1st show in Yekaterinburg, watching the audience enjoy our music even though there was a language barrier. They didn't have to understand us to love the music.

BANDS



RED BRICK BOYS



RAYDO



STAMBULCHIK BROTHERS



IZUMRUD

THE BANDS

FROM THE U.S.

Donna Ulisse and The Poor Mountain Boys

Famous American bluegrass singer and songwriter Donna Ulisse received national popularity and recognition after the release of her album, "Trouble at the Door" in 1991. In recent years, Donna Ulisse has released many songs united under the title of "Bluegrass without Borders;" most of those songs were written by Donna, including the ones categorized under "spiritual music." CDs with Donna Ulisse's music repeatedly won the highest awards at bluegrass and country music festivals, and Donna was acknowledged many times as one of the best bluegrass performers. Donna tours throughout the United States with her band The Poor Mountain Boys. Their trip to Russia in the summer of 2011 was the first international tour for Donna and for most participants of her band. More information about Donna Ulisse and The Poor Mountain Boys can be found on the following website: <http://www.donnaulisse.com>.

FROM THE U.S. MISSION TO RUSSIA

FACEBOOK
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FROM RUSSIA

Finestreet

The St. Petersburg band Finestreet received recognition from Russian and foreign colleagues thanks to its courageous music innovations and unforgettable concert drive. Aleksey Smirnov and Sergey Starodubtsev are the founders and creative leaders of the band. The musicians are prize-holders of many European festivals; their bright performances always attract press attention and cause numerous discussions. In its formative years, the band played mostly classical bluegrass and country music. Now, the Finestreet musicians have moved on to a wider repertoire, which includes some of their own compositions.

The Red Brick Boys

The Red Brick Boys is a Moscow band comprised of passionate American music fans. For many years, its members have played bluegrass for their friends and soul mates, and only in the summer of 2010 did the group of friends officially form a band. Their repertoire is diverse: it ranges from traditional tunes by Bill Monroe and Earl Scruggs to arrangements of both popular and traditional Americana songs. The band incorporates improvisation and self-expression in most of their performances.

Folk Band of the Architectural and Ethnographic Museum "Semenkovo"

The folk band of the Architectural and Ethnographic Museum "Semenkovo" was established in 2008. The band unites six professional musicians who all have studied at musical educational institutions in Vologda. The leader of the band – Maria V. Maurina – is an alumna of the Department of Ethnomusicology of the Musical and Pedagogical School of Vologda Pedagogical University. The band focuses on mastering and spreading folk songs and other elements of Russian traditional culture to their audiences. There are more than 70 traditional folk songs, games and dances from different regions of Russia in the band's repertoire.

(Continued on the next page.)



Donna Ulisse with
«The Poor Mountain Boys»



The Bands Cont'd.

Cheerful Diligence

Cheerful Diligence is a children's bluegrass and country band. It was established in 1988 in the Russian city of Obninsk. Since then, the band has had a rotating cast of members. The first lineup was nominated for a Grammy in 2003. The current and fourth lineup performed at the Festival of Country Music in Finland, the Mamakabo Festival, and the Pushchin Festival of Guitar Poetry Bands. In 2010, Cheerful Diligence was the winner of the International Festival of Creative Youth of Europe "Spring Stars" in Poland. In June of 2010, the band performed at the First Russian Bluegrass Festival in Vologda. John Beyrle, the U.S. Ambassador to Russia, called the Cheerful Diligence's concert at his Spaso House Residence "enchanting" and "very unusual."

Izumrud ("Emerald")

The Yekaterinburg-based band, IzumRUd (Emerald), is a highly acclaimed group of musical experimentalists. They produce an eclectic mix of music with an eclectic mix of instruments, including Russian balalaika, domra, accordion, bass-balalaika and a colorful palette of percussion. Their traditional roots connect them to local audiences, but they have gained an international following after participating in European music festivals. Their travels, in turn, have influenced the flavor of their music. Today, their songs embody elements of jazz, blues, art-rock, and classical, which blend into their own brand of World Fusion. They are considered to be the driving force of the International World Music Festival "The Emerald City," which is held annually in the Urals capital.

Mother Russia and Me, A Song by Donna Ulisse

MOTHER RUSSIA TOOK MY BREATH AWAY
WITH SIGHTS SO FOREIGN TO MY EVERYDAY
WALKED THE STREETS OF MOSCOW LIKE A LITTLE CHILD
AND FELT A CLOSENESS THERE IN SPITE OF ALL THE MILES

CAUSE WHEN I HELD THE HANDS OF STRANGERS
TALKING UNFAMILIAR LANGUAGE
THEIR EYES SPOKE THE SAME TRUTH AS MINE
AND IT WAS WARMTH WE WERE EXCHANGING
THROUGH THE MELODY OF AGES
IN A TONGUE AS CLEAR AS LOVE AND OLD AS TIME

MOTHER RUSSIA OPENED UP HER ARMS
AND WELCOMED ME LIKE I WAS COMIN' HOME
IT ONLY TOOK A GLIMPSE INTO HER ANCIENT HEART
TO SEE HOW IT WAS BEATING LIKE MY OWN

AND WHEN I HELD THE HANDS OF STRANGERS
TALKING UNFAMILIAR LANGUAGE
THEIR EYES SPOKE THE SAME TRUTH AS MINE
AND IT WAS WARMTH WE WERE EXCHANGING
THROUGH THE MELODY OF AGES
IN A TONGUE AS CLEAR AS LOVE AND OLD AS TIME

WE ARE THE SAME, WE ARE THE SAME
AT THE END OF THE DAY WE ARE THE SAME

Guitar, Banjo, &...Balalayka!

Before the music festival, the U.S. Consulate General in Yekaterinburg launched a Facebook contest entitled, "Guitar, Banjo &...Balalayka!" Reaching out to an even larger population with the use of virtual and social media, the Consulate's contest invited Russian country music and folk-rock bands to submit videos online. As a result, three bands were chosen as semi-finalists, and were given the chance to perform live on stage at the "Bluegrass in the Ural Mountains" International Music Festival. Following the performances of the three finalist groups (*Walkersband* [Ufa], *Liza & the Machine* [Yekaterinburg], and *Glad to be Vlad* [Yekaterinburg]), an applause from the audience determined the ultimate winner of the contest, *Liza & the Machine*. For their participation and success in the competition, the winning band was awarded with an American banjo.



BANDS



FINESTREET



CHEERFUL DILIGENCE



LIZA AND THE MACHINE



GLAD TO BE VLAD

PRESS COVERAGE

“The idea for the Bluegrass Festival was formed here, in Vologda, for many reasons. We wanted to organize a conversation between the two cultures through music. Music stimulates people to come together despite differences in opinions, languages, and perceptions of the world. Therefore, bluegrass as a form of American folk music can mean something for people of different cultures, just like Russian folklore,” – Yekaterina Mazilova, Academic Secretary of the Vologda State Historical and Architectural Museum. (Information Agency *News from the Vologda Region*, <http://newsvo.ru>)

After the very first song, Donna seized the opportunity to thank the audience and to confess love to her husband – the guitar player in her band – by saying “yellow blue bas” which is consonant to the Russian phrase “Ya lyublyu vas” (“I love you”). (Newspaper *Premiere – News from the Week*, <http://premier.region35.ru>)

“Music makes cultures and people closer to one another, – says Aleksey Smirnov, vocalist of the Finestreet band. – “Could anyone imagine 20 years ago that a Lithuanian, a man from the Russian city Vorkuta and a Tatar from St. Petersburg would come to Vologda to play American music with roots extending back to Western Europe? The sounds of Russian music can also be found in bluegrass, and it is so cool that this music is coming back to us.” (Newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda – Vologda*, <http://vologda.kp.ru>)



A folk ensemble from Vologda performs native Russian songs



Aleksei from the «Red Brick Boys»



Members of «Cheerful Diligence» perform in Yekaterinburg

Robert [Palomo] is an American who has been living in St. Petersburg more than 15 years. He played traditional American songs, and surprised everyone at the end of his performance by singing the song “This Is It” by the [Russian] rock group “DDT.” The audience applauded and sang together with Robert, inspiring him to leave the stage saying, “This is not it!” (Newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda – Vologda*, <http://vologda.kp.ru>)

“Of course rock-n-roll is popular in America, but people love bluegrass because the United States is not made of just New York. Most of the American population lives in small towns, and people there love this music because it is so family-oriented and spiritual,” – says Kimberly Williams, U.S. Consul for Press and Culture in Yekaterinburg. (Online Project *Bezformata.ru*, <http://bezformata.ru>)

WHAT IS...?

WHAT IS «AMERICAN SEASONS IN RUSSIA?»

The title of the “American Seasons” program pays homage to Sergei Diaghilev and his efforts at the beginning of the 20th century to introduce Russian culture to Europe. Starting in 1906, Diaghilev spearheaded an endeavor to bring the best of Russian music, dance, and art to the European stage; a project he called “Russian Seasons” in Paris. “American Seasons in Russia” is designed to bring a similarly wide spectrum of cultural offerings to the Russian public in order to introduce them to contemporary artists from the United States. Taking its cue from Diaghilev’s love of ballet, the “American Seasons” began with a tour by a contemporary dance troupe, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. During the program, visual artists’ works will also be featured in exhibitions throughout Russia, such as the Annie Leibovitz exhibit at the State Hermitage Museum. The “American Seasons” initiative is taking place under the auspices of the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission.

<http://americanseasons.ru>



President Barack Obama bids farewell to Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in Moscow, Russia, July 7, 2009. (Official White House

WHAT IS THE BILATERAL PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION?

The U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission was created on July 9, 2009, by Presidents Obama and Medvedev to increase cooperation, move beyond Cold War mentalities, chart a fresh start in relations between the two countries, and contribute to future progress and shared prosperity. The Commission now consists of 20 working groups which foster collaboration in areas as diverse as science and technology, civil society, missile defense, and counternarcotics. “American Seasons” is the result of the activities of the Working Group on Culture, Education, Sports, and Media.

<http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/usrussiabilat/index.htm>